Safety Report
October 2001 through January 2002

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Department managers and employees with periodic updates on the progress of Department safety initiatives, information regarding important safety issues, and statistics concerning accident rates throughout the Department. Section One of the report, Program Initiatives, provides updates on the safety initiatives outlined in the proposed Safety Program Plan (see Appendix A), in addition to other Department-wide safety initiatives. Section Two, Significant Safety Issues, outlines safety issues and concerns which arise during the reporting period. Section Three, Injury Statistics, provides monthly statistics regarding Department injuries as reported to the Office of Workers' Compensation and provides analysis of the data to assist bureaus in focusing their safety efforts.

Section One: Program Initiatives

Resources: The Department Safety Program was transferred with three FTE from the Department's Office of Administrative Services (OAS) to the Department's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) in November 2001. An additional FTE was later added. The new FTE will be used to recruit for a GS-15 Safety Manager. The position should be filled by mid-March.

An important aspect of developing new approaches to safety issues is understanding what safety resources we currently have within the Department and how the bureaus are organized to address safety issues. Consequently, we have worked with bureaus to identify the number of full and part-time safety staff at each of the bureaus and the scope of services provided by bureau health units. This information was provided to bureau representatives at the December Safety Council meeting. (see Appendix B)

Safety Council: Regularly scheduled Safety Council meetings were in held in October, December, and January, and two special Safety Council meetings were also held. The special meeting held on January 23, 2002, gave preliminary results of the inquiry conducted by scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Hazardous Materials Response Division of the National Ocean Service, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to define the range of the possible causes of health threatening symptoms from irradiated mail. The November meeting focused on the anthrax threat. Katherine West, a public health nurse contractor from the Public Health Service, delivered an informative presentation on the anthrax threat and bureau safety personnel explained how they were modifying mail procedures to provide employee protection.

Safety Program Action Plan: In December, we distributed a proposed Safety Program Action Plan (see Appendix A) at the Safety Council meeting. The initial focus of the plan is to create a safety infrastructure within the Department to improve information flow between bureaus and the Department and to establish a structure and methodology to address important safety issues cooperatively. Four workgroups are being established to address key components of the proposed Safety Program Action Plan:

- Inspections and Self-Assessment Workgroup - This workgroup will develop a Department-wide methodology for supervisors to conduct safety self-assessments and trained safety professionals to complete annual workplace inspections.

- Communications and Training Policy Workgroup - This workgroup will establish methods for soliciting employee and supervisory input regarding safety concerns, and for increasing the level of safety awareness among Department employees and supervisors.

- Reporting Workgroup - This workgroup will address the challenging task of developing a web-based system to report accidents which will be more comprehensive than the Workers' Compensation system.

- Health Units Workgroup - This workgroup will assess the effectiveness of Department Health Units and develop Departmental policy regarding on-site health and occupational safety services.

Work is beginning on these areas in February.

Employee Communications: One of the most effective ways to broadly disseminate safety information is through the internet. Consequently, we developed a safety website at http://ohrm.doc.gov/safetyprogram to provide a variety of information concerning safety and occupational health, including the latest news regarding mail handling. The website also provides links to bureau safety websites and other important websites such as the Centers for Disease Control and the Environmental Protection Agency. In addition, we have created a special link on this site to collect employee views, issues, and concerns about safety in "real time," as well as complete a trend analysis of employee perceptions on safety issues across the Department.

OSHA Annual Report: Annually, the Department is required to provide a Safety and Occupational Health Program report to OSHA. Information includes significant accident or injury trends, plus information regarding key program initiatives completed during the reporting year. The Department of Labor will extract excerpts from our report, and from reports from other Federal agencies, to compile a consolidated report for the President.

Section Two: Significant Safety Issues

Anthrax Threat: In response to the anthrax mail threats which occurred this fall, several initiatives were implemented in the Herbert C. Hoover Building (HCHB) to protect Commerce employees. Following the discovery of mail containing anthrax spores delivered to Senator Daschle's office, mail to HCHB was discontinued since mail to both locations comes through the Brentwood postal facility. The HCHB mailroom was subsequently shut down and tested for the presence of anthrax spores. The results were negative and the mail room began receiving bulk mail and periodicals, but no first-class mail in early November. The Postal Service announced that all first-class mail going to Federal agencies would be irradiated, which would eliminate exposure to live anthrax spores. Prior to the resumption of first class mail, a containment booth was installed in the basement of HCHB as an additional precaution. The booth was equipped with a special ventilation system which draws any dust or other such materials from the mail through a high efficiency particulate (HEPA) filter. The filters are sent to a laboratory each day for analysis and none of the tests have shown the presence of spores.

***Irradiated Mail Incident*s:** On January 10th, two Commerce workers at HCHB in Washington, DC fell ill, experiencing nausea, facial flushing and respiratory difficulty after having handled irradiated mail, and a third also experienced some difficulty after visiting that office. The employees received immediate attention in the HCHB Health Unit. The Health Unit notified Emergency response authorities when they determined, based upon their analysis of the facts, that environmental factors were a possible cause of the symptoms. Each of these employees has received appropriate medical attention, and has recovered.

All employees who work in the vicinity of the affected area were asked to leave their offices and subsequently released early as a precaution. All HCHB air-handling units were shut down, and the first corridor on the fifth floor was cordoned off.

During this episode, we relied on the expertise provided by the District of Columbia Police and Fire Departments, including their HAZMAT unit, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to assess as quickly as possible what sort of hazard existed.

That evening, the Environmental Protection Agency chemists tested the irradiated mail and the air in the offices of the employees who experienced symptoms. Testing results were provided to us over the weekend and we have been assured by the EPA that the building is safe for employees. EPA advised us that it is possible that fumes that built up inside a closed Xerox box containing irradiated mail may have caused the reactions experienced by these employees.

Whatever caused these symptoms has now dissipated and it is unlikely that experts will be able to determine exactly what occurred. What is known is that each individual has different tolerance levels for, and reactions to, potentially noxious substances. In addition, similar situations have been reported in the Patent and Trademark Office, the Bureau of the Census, and the Bureau of Export Administration.

A team of scientists has provided substantial support to the Department in investigating these incidents. At the request of the Department's Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary of Administration, the National Ocean Service (NOS) within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) sent its Hazardous Materials Response Division (HAZMAT) to lead an inquiry to clearly define the range of possible causes related to health threatening symptoms from irradiated mail, and to formulate procedures for handling it. NOAA HAZMAT has distinguished itself as a leader in the field of hazardous materials response. The team has earned a sound reputation for successful response through rapid, well-thought-out, yet cost-effective environmental protection decisions in handling hazardous spill emergencies. Relying on this significant expertise, the team of experts from NOAA's HAZMAT coordinated an inter-Departmental and inter-agency effort to determine what can be learned from the experience, to avoid future incidents. Scientific experts from the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the U.S. Postal Service participated. In addition, NOAA HAZMAT also involved leading scientific researchers from Louisiana State University to assess the problem. These experts corroborated the initial findings from EPA testing, and provided preliminary results (see Appendix C). The team also provided us with an excellent explanation of allergic reactions which is attached (see Appendix D). A final report is expected in early February.

Section Three: Injury Statistics and Analysis

In the October 2001 Safety Report, we provided information on the total number of Departmental injuries for the past five years. We also gave information on injury statistics for Census 2000 employees.[1] Lastly, we analyzed the types of injuries across the Department, to determine prevalence of such injuries.

Below, we update this information. Please keep in mind that the data presented in the charts and tables are based upon Departmental Workers' Compensation Program records. At the present time, Workers' Compensation Program records continue to afford the most comprehensive

[1]Decennial Census 2000 were included in the October 2001 report and are now being treated as a separate category.

evidence regarding workplace safety. However, the significant disruption of mail during the first quarter of FY 2002 clearly affected the validity and reliability of the data. As a result, the information presented here must, accordingly, be considered "qualified."

Injury Rates: Injury rate information is provided in Figure 1 and Table 1[2] . Major findings include:

- **When compared to FY 2001 and FY 2000 data, the FY 2002 injury rate may be declining across the Department.** Although the data may not yet be complete, the ***annualized*** FY 2002 injury rate is projected to be 1.1 injuries per 100 employees, based on data for the first quarter of this fiscal year. If this injury rate is accurate and sustained, it would be substantially lower than the injury rates for FY 2001 (1.7 injuries per 100 employees) or FY 2000 (2.1 injuries per 100 employees).

- **Overall, PTO and the Office of the Secretary (OS) appear to be demonstrating the most improvement over time; ITA, on the other hand, has experienced an increasing injury rate.** Early statistics indicate that the injury rate in ITA has increased from .6 per 100 employees in FY 2001 to 2.3 per 100 employees in 2002, assuming that the first quarter is reflective of a developing annual trend for ITA in FY 2002. On the other hand, PTO has maintained a comparatively lower overall injury rate (.5 injuries per 100 employees) for the past 2 fiscal years. PTO's annual rate, if sustained throughout FY 2002, would decrease to .4 injuries per 100 employees. For OS, the projected injury rate (based on first quarter information) would be .9 injuries per 100 employees, compared to 2.2 and 3.4 injuries per 100 employees in FY 2001 and FY 2000, respectively.

- **Of the smaller bureaus (i.e., bureaus with less than 500 employees), NTIA and BXA have shown increased injury rates in FY 2002, to date.** If injuries within NTIA and BXA occur at the same rate for the remainder of the fiscal year, the projected injury rates for these agencies will be 3.1 and 3.0 injuries per 100 employees, respectively.

[2] **Please note:** The injury rates for FY 2002 presented in this table have been "annualized" based on first quarter FY 2002 information. To accomplish this "annualization," we took first quarter FY 2002 statistics, multiplied these numbers by 4, and then divided by each bureaus's employee population. This process enabled us to compute a projected annual rate for each bureau, and for the Department. Our assumption, which may or may not be valid, is that injury rates will remain somewhat constant over the course of the year. As we prepare new reports, we will incorporate updated statistical data and modify the projected "annualized" rates accordingly.

Figure 1.

Overall, bureau injury rates have been declining.

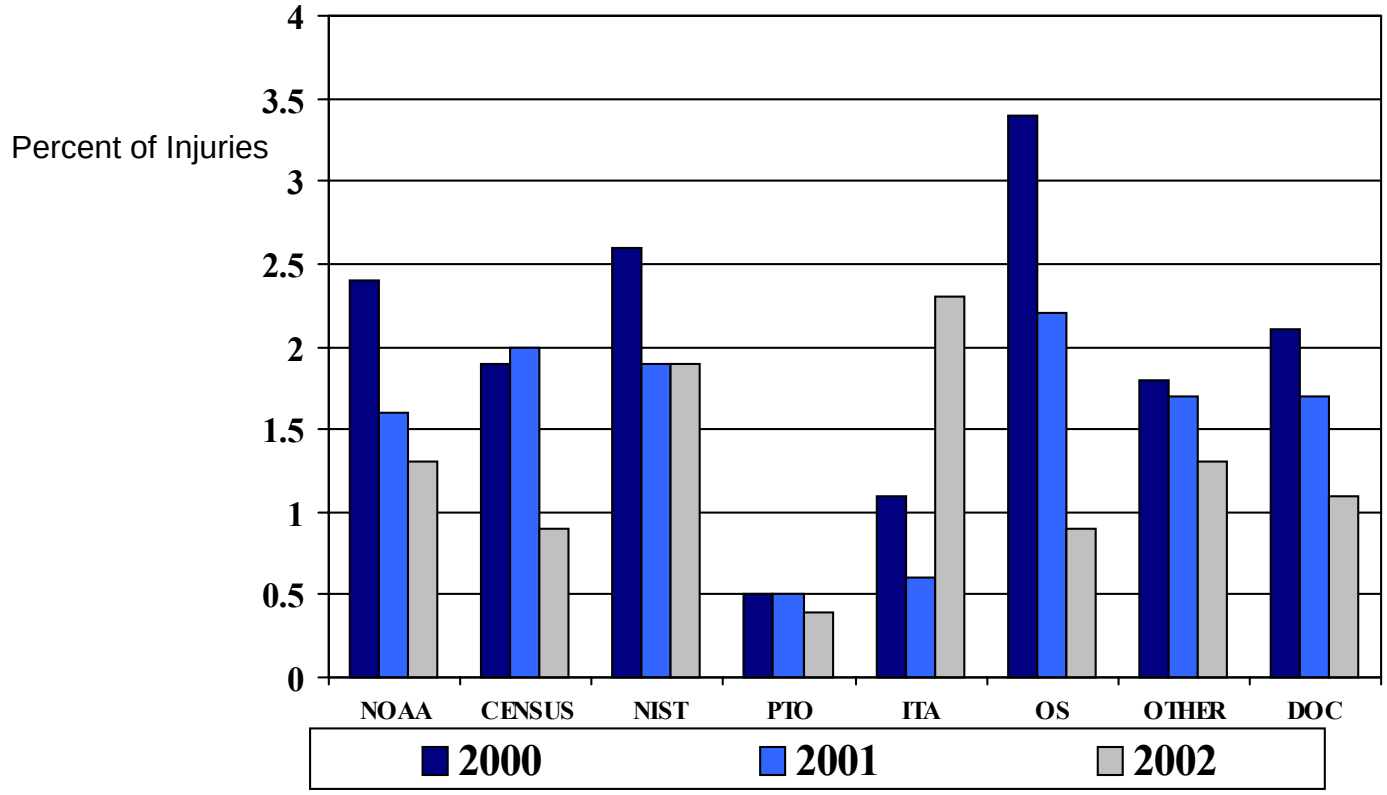


Table 1.

INJURY TREND REPORT

Rate = Rate per hundred employees

Bureau	FY1998		FY 1999		FY 2000		FY 2001		FY 2002 (To Date)			Current Month (12/2001)	
									Actual	Annualized[3]			
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	No.	Rate	No.	Rate
Office of the Secretary	17	2.1	19	2.0	34	3.4	22	2.2	2	8	.9	0	0
Office of Inspector General	2	1.1	2	1.2	5	3.4	2	1.3	0	0	0	0	0
Bureau of Economic Analysis	8	1.8	4	.8	1	.2	5	1.0	0	0	0	0	0
Bureau of the Census	282	.8	311	.9	383	1.9	357	2.0	29	116	.9	7	.7
Bureau of Export Administration	10	2.7	11	2.8	15	3.7	8	2.0	3	12	3.0	0	0
Economic Development Administration	4	1.5	9	3.3	4	1.5	5	1.9	1	4	1.5	1	4.6
International Trade Administration	26	1.2	18	.8	24	1.1	10	.6	10	40	2.3	0	0
Minority Business Development Agency	1	1.0	1	1.0	3	3.1	4	3.9	0	0	0	0	0
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	280	2.3	317	2.5	306	2.4	216	1.6	40	160	1.3	13	1.3
National Telecommunications & Information Administration	3	1.1	2	.8	2	.8	7	2.7	2	8	3.1	1	4.7
Patent and Trademark Office	38	.7	27	.4	29	.5	31	.5	6	24	.4	2	.4
Technology Administration	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
National Institute of Standards and Technology	105	3.2	84	2.3	80	2.6	60	1.9	15	60	1.9	0	0
National Technical Information Service	2	.6	6	2.4	4	1.9	1	.5	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	778	1.6	811	1.3	890	2.1	728	1.7	108*	432	1.1	24*	.7
Decennial Census 2000	182	1.5	890	6.6	4798	3.5	32	3.0	N/A	N/A			

***Figures may be low due to mail disruption. DATA SOURCE: Workers' Compensation System**

[3]This column contains the projected "annualized" injury rate for FY 2002, based on first quarter statistical information.

Types of Injuries: Information on types of injuries is provided in Figure 2, and Tables 2A, 2B, and 2C. Unlike the earlier analysis, these findings are based on actual injury counts. We do not project findings for the remainder of FY 2002. Key findings are:

- **"Slips/Falls" continue to be the most prevalent type of injury.** Overall, "slips/falls" account for 35 percent of all injuries within the Department. This trend is holding steady across FY 00, 01, and the first quarter of 02.

- **"Exertion" injuries are second in frequency, followed by "Contact/Object" injuries.** Seventeen percent of injuries reported relate to "exertion," while 9 percent are caused by some sort of contact or object.

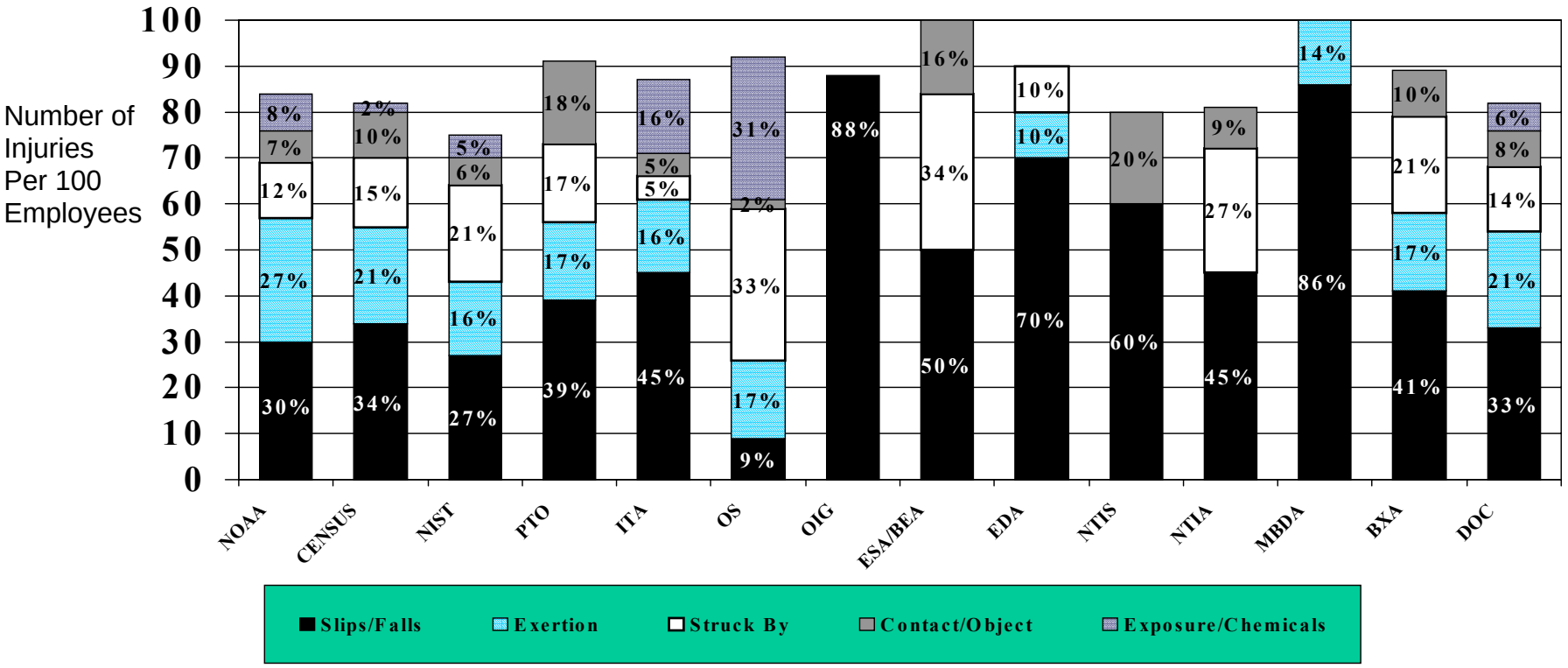
- **"Slips/Falls" are most common in ITA and smaller Commerce bureaus, while "Exertion" injuries are more frequently found in NOAA and Census.** Of injuries in smaller Commerce bureaus, more than half (56 percent) are "slips/falls;" within ITA, almost half (45 percent) are "slips/falls." Notably, the OIG, MBDA, EDA, and NTIS are experiencing "slips/falls" at 88 percent, 86 percent,70 percent, and 60 percent, respectively. On the other hand, more than one-third (34 percent) of Census injuries have been categorized as "exertion" while close to three of ten (27 percent) of NOAA injuries are "exertion"-related.

- **Office of the Secretary and ITA more frequently reported incidences of "Exposure/ Chemicals" than other bureaus.** In OS, 31 percent of injuries during this time period were classified as "exposure/chemicals" and in ITA, 16 percent were in this category. There were no "exposure/chemicals" injuries reported in eight Commerce bureaus during this time period.

- **As expected, injuries related to the Decennial have declined to zero.** Since the Decennial field operations shut down on September 30, 2001, there have been no injuries reported in FY 02 for Decennial workers, as shown in Table 2C. In addition, the overall number of new injuries reported in FY 01 was 32, compared to 4,798 reported in FY 00 at the height of the Decennial.

Figure 2.

For the period FY 2000-2002, "Slips and Falls" continue to be the most prevalent type of injury.



Note: The remaining % fall into all other types of injuries, including injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stoke.

Table 2A.

INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU

AGENCIES WITH MORE THAN 500 EMPLOYEES

(Through December 31, 2001)

BUREAU	NOAA			CENSUS			NIST			PTO			ITA			OS			TOTAL
Fiscal Year	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	
Struck By/Against An Object	42	24	3	54	56	3	17	16	0	4	6	1	1	1	0	0	5	0	233
Falls/Slips	83	72	12	96	153	10	17	19	6	11	13	2	13	5	2	9	10	0	533
Caught On An Object	6	4	0	8	9	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	35
Cuts/Bites	29	20	6	55	36	3	15	12	1	1	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	185
Contact With An Object	23	13	2	49	24	1	8	1	1	5	6	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	137
Exertion/ Motion	75	64	10	99	54	7	15	7	3	8	3	0	4	1	2	6	3	1	362
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	29	13	2	12	7	0	4	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	6	18	0	0	96
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	4	4	5	3	10	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	33
Miscellaneous*	15	2	0	7	8	0	2	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	40
TOTAL**	306	216	40	383	357	29	80	60	15	29	31	6	24	10	10	34	22	2	1654

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stoke.

** Decennial Census claims were omitted to provide a clearer picture of injury trends

Table 2B.

INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU

AGENCIES WITH LESS THAN 500 EMPLOYEES
(Through December 31, 2001)

Bureau	OIG			ESA/BEA			EDA			TA			NTIS			NTIA			MBDA			BXA			TOTAL
Fiscal Year	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	**00**	**01**	**02**	
Struck By/Against An Object	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	12
Falls/Slips	4	2	0	1	2	0	2	4	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	3	1	3	3	0	6	6	0	42
Caught On An Object	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Cuts/Bites	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contact With An Object	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	6
Exertion/ Motion	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	2	0	7
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous*	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6
Total	5	2	0	1	5	0	4	5	1	0	0	0	4	1	0	2	7	2	3	4	0	15	8	6	75

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stoke.

Table 2C.

INJURY TYPES - DECENNIAL CENSUS

(Through December 31, 2001)

	CENSUS 2000			TOTAL
Fiscal Year	**00**	**01**	**02**	
Struck By/Against An Object	760	5	0	765
Falls/Slips	1688	13	0	1701
Caught On An Object	82	0	0	82
Cuts/Bites	1268	1	0	1269
Contact With An Object	295	1	0	296
Exertion/ Motion	309	9	0	318
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	56	0	0	56
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	136	3	0	139
Miscellaneous*	204	0	0	204
TOTAL	4798	32	0	4830

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stoke.

Appendix A

Safety Action Plan for FY 2002

Action	Lead Person	Due Date	Performance Measure	Status
Guidance, Policy, and Training				
Complete Department Organization Order (DOO) reflecting safety move to OHRM.	**John Phelan**	**ASAP**	**Safety Function formally moved to OHRM.**	**In clearance process.**
Change Department Safety Plan to reflect changes in responsibility and update as necessary (e.g., redesignation of Department Safety and Health Official, etc.)	**Jim Gallo/Alex Mayes**	**February 2002**	**Safety Plan reflects organization and policy changes.**	**Changes currently being made.**
Develop safety performance element for SES performance plans.	**Joan Jorgenson/Michael Osver**	**December 15, 2001**	**Performance element clearly states managerial responsibilities for safety.**	**Draft Complete. Vetting is underway with key Departmental leadership.**
Develop safety training material to be used in supervisor training.	**Jim Gallo/Beverly Brebnor/Communications and Training Workgroup**	**March 2002**	**Safety module developed and cleared by Safety Council. Incorporated into all new supervisory training.**	**Communications and Training Policy Workgroup to meet in February. Collected baseline data.**

Action	Lead Person	Due Date	Performance Measure	Status
Guidance, Policy, and Training (continued)				
Conduct safety training using new safety material at supervisory training classes.	**Jim Gallo/Beverly Brebnor/Communications and Training Policy Workgroup**	**On-going beginning May 2002**	**New supervisors are aware of safety program and safety requirements.**	**Develop through Communications and Training Policy Workgroup.**
Develop and conduct mandatory safety briefings for all employees HCHB.	**Jim Gallo/Beverly Brebnor/ Communications and Training Policy Workgroup.**	**April 2002**	**30 minute briefing with Department-wide perspective developed and cleared by Safety Council; to be combined with 30 minute operating unit specific briefing.**	**Develop through Communications and Training Policy Workgroup.**
Inspections and Oversight				
Department issues bureau safety plan accountability guidance.	**Jim Gallo/Inspections and Self Assessments Workgroup .**	**April 2002**	**Clear guidance provided to bureaus regarding accountability requirements.**	**Develop through Inspections and Self Assessments Workgroup.**
Bureaus submit safety accountability plans for OHRM approval. Plans include self-assessment component, inspection schedule, an employee and manager education plan, and health unit evaluation criteria.	**Bureau safety managers**	**May 2002**	**Safety accountability plans meet OHRM requirements.**	**Pending Department accountability guidance.**

Action	Lead Person	Due Date	Performance Measure	Status
Inspections and Oversight (Continued)				
Develop HCHB inspection schedules for FY 2002 and conduct physical inspections of workplace.	**Alex Mayes/Roz Hill**	**March 2002**	**Reporting system developed for bureaus to verify that annual inspections conducted. HCHB schedule developed. Protocol developed for HCHB and Department, with allowed deviations.**	**Inspection package and proposed schedule will be forwarded to Director, OHRM, for review on January 16, 2002.** **Reporting system to be developed by Reporting Workgroup in late January/early February.**
Bureaus provide inspection and reinspection schedule to OHRM and begin conducting inspections per schedule.	**Bureau safety managers**	**June 1, 2002**	**Inspections are conducted per schedule and in accordance with OHRM guidance.**	**Pending development of Commerce inspection guidance.**
Conduct review of Department Health Units to determine services provided, costs, types of contracts, length of contractor, etc.	**Jim Gallo/Health Units Workgroup**	**February 2002**	**Baseline information gathered on health units from which Department-wide policies regarding health units can be developed.**	**Baseline information disseminated at January Safety Council. Health Units Workgroup conduct analysis of data in February 2002.**
Review the HCHB Health Unit for services provided, efficiency, contract, etc.	**Jim Gallo/Roz Hill**	**February 2002**	**Clear understanding of services provided, costs of contract, opportunities for improvement, etc.**	**Will meet with HCHB Health Unit COTR in February 2002.**

Inspection and Oversight (Continued)				
Review safety self-assessment activities of bureaus.	**Debra Tomchek, December 6 Safety Council Meeting**	**January 2002**	**Baseline information regarding bureau self-assessment activities.**	**Complete. Information disseminated at January Safety Council meeting.**
Develop safety self-assessment guide for bureaus and self-assessment requirements.	**Jim Gallo/Alex Mayes/Inspections and Self Assessments Workgroup**	**May 2002**	**Self-assessment guide provides clear and concise criteria against which managers can evaluate the safety of their work area.**	**Inspections and Self Assessments Workgroup meet in February 2002 to develop.**
Conduct oversight review of Census efforts to address injuries resulting from the Decennial.	**Jim Gallo/Alex Mayes**	**March 2002**	**Number and extent of injuries are accurately reported and agency has taken appropriate steps to meet agency obligations vis-a-vis injuries.**	**Schedule meeting with Census in February to discuss data requirements.**

Action	Lead Person	Due Date	Performance Measure	Status
Coordination and Communication				
Hold Safety Council Meeting (establish safety infrastructure/counterpart group).	**Jim Gallo**	**Monthly/Quarterly**	**Meetings are held as scheduled; participants identified, notified, and provided notice in advance.**	**On-going.**
Develop safety web site.	**Jim Gallo/Michael Osver**	**February 2002**	**Safety web site contains up-to-date information on safety.**	**Present Web site concept to be presented to Deputy Secretary in February 2002.**
Convene employees/managerial focus groups to determine level of concern and awareness of safety in the Department to determine employee concerns.	**Debra Tomchek**	**March 2002**	**Representative group of Department managers and employees meet and provide clear direction for safety program to follow.**	**Communications and Training Policy Workgroup address in February 2002.**
Communicate changes in safety program, and increase employee and managerial awareness of safety program, and safety requirements. Create safety posters, safety posters in NFC pay stub, and monthly all hands employee e-mail.	**Jim Gallo/Sheila Fleishell/ Roz Hill**	**February 2002, on-going**	**Increased awareness of safety program among both managers and employees.**	**Develop through Communications and Training Policy Workgroup.**

Action	Lead Person	Due Date	Performance Measure	Status
Reporting Requirements				
Develop web-based system for reporting of accidents.	**Jim Gallo/Gary Jacobs/Reporting Workgroup**	**March 2002**	**Web-based system available to all bureaus and 100% of required data entered.**	**Reporting group meets in February to develop.**
Prepare monthly safety report for Deputy Secretary.	**Jim Gallo/Alex Mayes**	**15th of each month**	**Report prepared in timely manner and provides accurate representation of safety conditions within the Department.**	**Discuss receiving input from bureaus and content of report at February Safety Council meeting.**

Appendix B

Baseline Safety Information

Safety Resources:

At Commerce headquarters there are currently two full-time safety specialists.

NIST has 26 full-time safety specialists at their Gaithersburg facility and three full-time safety specialists at their Boulder, Colorado facility. In addition, NIST has 86 Division Safety representatives, which are collateral duty personnel, and twelve Safety Coordinators.

NOAA has six full-time safety specialists/managers at their Silver Spring headquarters, and one Regional Safety Manager at each of their four Administrative Support Centers. Additionally, there are numerous collateral duty safety personnel at their many facilities.

The Census Bureau has one safety manager at their Suitland headquarters, and three full-time safety specialists at their Jeffersonville, Indiana facility.

NTIA has one collateral duty safety representative at Commerce headquarters.

NTIS has one collateral duty safety representative at their Springfield, VA facility.

BEA has one collateral duty safety representative at their offices at 1441 L Street NW in downtown Washington DC

EDA, ITA, MBDA, and OIG each have one collateral duty safety representative at Commerce headquarters.

Self Assessments:

At NIST the following self assessment activities are conducted:

- Oversight audits are conducted at their laboratories on a quarterly basis to ensure compliance with OSHA requirements and to measure the effectiveness of their safety program. Additionally, monthly audits are conducted of their safety procedures to ensure they are current with on-going operations.

- All accidents and injuries are reviewed to detect any trends and take necessary corrective action.

At NOAA the following self assessment activities are conducted:

- During FY 2001 17 oversight audits were conducted of their safety programs and procedures by a third party contractor in conjunction with NOAA personnel. In addition, 12 internal oversight audits were conducted by NOAA personnel of their safety programs. In 2002 there will be additional oversight audits conducted.

- During FY 2001 a comprehensive review of their Environmental and Safety Program was conducted to identify deficiencies. A booklet was prepared outlining the findings of this audit, which is being used to address the deficiencies.

At the Census Bureau the following self assessment activities are conducted:

- Safety specialists and managers from their Jeffersonville, Indiana facility conducted oversight audits of the safety programs during FY 2001 at the Hagerstown, MD and Tucson, AZ telephone centers.

Safety Inspections:

At NIST all facilities are inspected on an annual basis. At the Gaithersburg facility the annual safety and health inspections are conducted by their safety staff. At the Boulder facility the inspections are conducted by the MASC safety manager and the safety technician. In addition, all laboratories are monitored on a quarterly basis by safety representatives. These reviews are not formal inspections. The representatives review the safety processes and procedures in each laboratory and report their findings to the laboratory director and the NIST Safety Office.

At NOAA safety inspections are conducted at varying frequencies at their approximately 600 buildings. In the National Capitol Region (NCR), the headquarters buildings, and a dozen other buildings in the Maryland suburbs are inspected annually by the NCR safety manager. In the Administrative Support Centers the Regional Safety Managers conduct safety inspections of many, but not all of the main facilities annually. Many of the smaller facilities are on a 1 to 4 year inspection schedule due to lack of personnel and resources.

At the Census Bureau all facilities are inspected at least annually. The headquarters facilities in Suitland are inspected by collateral duty safety representatives with oversight from the Bureau's safety manager. All work spaces at their Jeffersonville, Indiana facility are inspected annually by the safety manager and other members of the safety staff.

Training and Communication:

Training:

At NIST all new employees and new supervisors receive a general safety orientation which provides basic safety and health guidance. Employees who work with specialized equipment, hazardous materials,

machinery, etc., or perform hazardous work are provided safety training specific to their duties prior to beginning work. Supervisors are provided with a checklist of safety-related topics to use when providing safety training to their employees.

At NOAA all new employees attend new employee orientation which includes safety training. Employees who work with specialized equipment, hazardous materials, machinery, etc., or perform hazardous work are provided safety training specific to their duties prior to beginning work. Each major facility has a Designated Responsible Officer who is responsible for safety at the facility. This person receives safety training as part of the indoctrination for this position.

At the Census Bureau all new employees and new supervisors receive safety training. At their Jeffersonville, Indiana facility a formal Power Point safety indoctrination is provided to all new employees and new supervisors.

Communication:

At NIST there is frequent communication between safety specialists, collateral duty safety personnel, supervisors and managers to discuss safety procedures, coordinate the correction of hazards, review new safety requirements, and discuss other issues.

At NOAA the Environmental and Safety Council meets bimonthly and all NOAA Regional Safety Managers, safety specialists, and environmental engineers attend to review the progress of safety and environmental projects, discuss new safety projects, and related matters.

At the Census Bureau safety managers/specialists communicate regularly to discuss significant safety and health issues and resolve on-going problems.

At Commerce headquarters the safety office staff communicates frequently with Departmental safety managers/specialists and employees via e-mail and telephone to exchange information about changes in the DOC safety program, provide guidance on a wide variety of safety-related problems, respond to inquiries, and other related matters.

At NIST, NOAA, the Census Bureau and Commerce headquarters extensive information about the Departments's safety and health program is available to all employees on web sites on the Internet. The web sites provide information about new precautions being taken against the anthrax threat, how to report unsafe or unhealthful conditions, what to do if an employee is injured, and other helpful information. The entire DOC Safety and Health Manual is also posted on these web sites.

Appendix C

NOAA Study Methodology

Goal Identification

Several Commerce workers experienced illness on the 10th of January. Other workers have also recently reported reaction to irradiated mail. In response to these incidents, our initial response goals include:

Provide Confidence in Workplace Safety based on the results of an analysis of the air quality in affected offices. The technical air quality evaluation will be accomplished by a coordinated effort of several health and environmental regulators and research institutions.

- Compare air quality in mailroom, effected offices, and other Commerce offices.
  - Action using Microfast GCS equipment by NOAA/LSU staff. Start analysis 22 January.
  - Sample air in mailroom and analyze using standard EPA test procedures.
    - Participate with EPA Region III on Jan 18 to collect samples.
- Request formal analysis of HVAC systems in effected areas by Building Manager

Provide a plausible explanation of potential causes of these illnesses to affected workers and coworkers.

- Remove "Tuesdays Mail," (now located in a burn bag under the copy machine) and conduct analysis of headspace.
  - Remove bag to LSU for analysis
- Interview impacted employees - actions, medical history, symptoms
  - Coordinate with CDC to conduct these interviews
- Interview DC Fire Department HAZMAT responders
- Interview EPA responders
- Eliminate "other" potential explanations
  - HVAC poor or upstream contamination in HVAC system
  - Other allergens, illnesses using advice from CDC
  - Conduct wipe of impacted office desk areas and analyze for trace chemicals
- Review data from the following sampling efforts by other agencies:
  - NIST and the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute (AFRRI) are conducting an independent study of 8 trays of "sample" mail that was irradiated under several control conditions at the Bridgeport plant.
  - NIOSH is also conducting sampling at DC postal facilities the week of 21 January.

Provide Confidence in Mail Handling Procedures to insure health and safety.

- Request NIOSH, now scheduled to conduct air quality analysis at OPM and Senator's Offices, also conduct similar air quality analysis at DOC.
- Review the process to receive, inspect, sort, and deliver mail will also protect the health and safety of mail handlers and commerce employees.
- Develop message to effected commerce employees that provides information on investigation and results of investigation that meets their needs.
- Employees with high sensitivity to trace environmental chemicals need to be identified and health and safety needs evaluated.
- NOAA continue to provide liaison on scientific issues.

"Gary Ott" <Gary.Ott@noaa.gov>

01/21/02 02:10 PM

-------- Original Message --------

Subject: Photo Doc of Air Sampling 18 Jan
Date: Mon, 21 Jan 2002 14:06:45 -0500
From: "Gary Ott" <Gary.Ott@noaa.gov>
To: Steve Lehmann <Steve.Lehmann@noaa.gov>,Scott S Stolz <Scott.S.Stolz@noaa.gov>, dtomcheck@doc.gov,djefferson1@doc.gov, bert.coursey@nist.gov, gary.ott@noaa.gov

Friday 18 Jan

EPA Region III and their Tetra Tech EM Inc. Staff took wipe samples of 3 envelopes. In addion they took air samples in the DOC Building as follows:

over 3 envelopes,
in room #5111, and
in the mail holding area at the loading dock.

Three digital photos of this sampling process are attached to this email FYI. They show the sampling process using 3 air pumps at each of the locations.

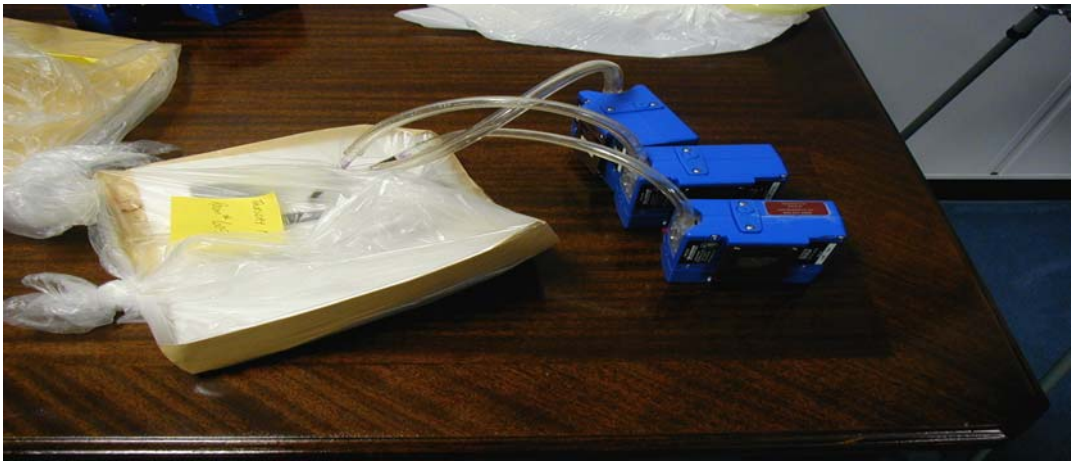
The attached photos are:

1. 17JanEnv#6095.JPG: shows the 3 pumps over the envelope sealed on 17 Jan, room #6095
2. 17/18JanEnv.JPG: shows the 3 pumps over each of the envelopes collected in rooms #5230 and #6095
3. 18JanHoldingDock.JPG: shows the 3 pumps taking air over mail at the mail holding area of the loading dock

Results of the analysis of these samples are expected after the Monday holiday .

Tuesday 22 January

On Tuesday, 22 January, NOAA's HAZMAT and EPA Region III expect to return to several areas in the DOC Building and use a number of other air sampling and analysis procedures. The instruments used on Tuesday will provide almost "real time" analysis of samples collected. This NOAA/EPA technical staff will probably required some sort of cart to move a considerable amount of equipment from site to site while they conduct their sampling program. A new member of the NOAA team will be Tony Pierpoint, an Industrial Hygienist, who will discuss progress with the DOC Safety Staff and those concerned in the sampling area.



Report form NOAA HAZMAT Team

End of Week 2 Report **25 January 2002**

The Postal Service has been irradiating the first class mail that comes to the Department of Commerce Building. The Postal Service reports that tests on the irradiated mail show that the irradiation will kill any anthrax contained in the mail.

A 22 January message from the Security Coordination Center noted:

> **"There are, however, some after-effects of the irradiation process. The mail is discolored, brittle, and often has pages stuck together. In addition, irradiated mail that contains plastic, such as a credit card, a plastic window on the envelope, or an item wrapped in plastic, does occasionally give off non-lethal chemical by-products, which might not smell very good. The Postal Service is aware of the problem and is "airing the mail out" for three days before delivering it."**

The detailed investigation by NOAA's Hazardous Materials Response Team (HAZMAT) started with few assumptions about the causes of reactions by DOC employees to irradiated mail. Our preliminary analysis of the air in a number of rooms in the DOC Building showed no elevated levels of chemical compounds. However, our preliminary analysis of the air from within some of the envelopes that allegedly caused reactions by employees showed extreme trace levels of low weight molecular weight compounds. The analytical efforts of other agencies that have been involved in the investigation of irradiated mail (EPA,NIOSH, NIST, Armed Forces Radiation Biology Research Institute) suggested that Furan, one of many possible low molecular weight chemicals that could be produced during the irradiation process was detected at extreme trace levels (i.e. parts per billion.) These extremely low detection levels (1000 times below normal chemical safety standards) required exceptional analytical equipment and expertise from our technical experts from Louisiana State University's Department of Environmental Studies.

There are, however, many other explanations for the symptoms that were described when we interviewed DOC employees. The medical community recognizes the complex interactions of increased dust (from dried out irradiated mail), low humidity air in the work place, flu season and pre-existing medical conditions. Each of these complexities makes it very difficult to pin the blame on only one simple issue.

Clearly, everyone is involved in the solution. The continued efforts of the Postal Service to protect those who receive the mail from anthrax may well require the continuation of the irradiation program. The development of appropriate irradiation, airing, and handling standards will require improvement as experience is obtained. The recommendations to employees that the Security Coordination Center included in their message of 22 January seem very reasonable.

> **"In most cases, these by-products will have no negative effects on…associates. However, a small number of Federal associates within the DC metro areas have experienced problems. The majority of these problems have show themselves as a minor skin rash that disappears within a few days. If you have sensitive skin, we recommend that you wear gloves when opening mail, or ask someone else to open your mail. Handling mail one piece at a time may also help, since the rash appears to be more common when a person is handling larger bundles of mail.**
>
> **A small number of Federal associates have experienced respiratory problems form working with irradiated mail. …, persons with asthma or other pre-existing respiratory problems are particularly sensitive. In order to minimize this potential problem we recommend that you:**
>
> - **Do no enclose the mail in a box or drawer, since this may contain any fumes inside the box and make the problem worse.**
> - **Spread out the mail so it can "air out" and minimize the effects of any of by-products that might still exist.**
> - **Handle the mail in areas where there is a good airflow.**
> - **Any associates who feel they are particularly vulnerable should ask someone else to open their mail."**

The analysis of the NOAA Scientific Support Team on the many samples that were taken this week in the DOC in offices and in irradiated mail will continue. Coordination with the other scientific organizations that are involved in the sampling process and in the study of irradiated mail will also continue. We will continue to interview employees who reported that they were impacted by irradiated mail to help us assess the relationship of contact with the mail and other possible causes of their response. We have asked the Federal Safety Director's Roundtable to gather past reports relative to this issue in order to prove or disprove our working hypotheses regarding trace levels of chemical compounds. Finally, our recommendation to the Federal Safety Director's Roundtable that they become a collection and coordination body for future incidents involving irradiated mail is in the draft stages. This recommendation will help us receive more information from other agencies that have also experienced problems, help with our analysis of more data and determine whether this a recurring concern.

Stephen M. Lehmann and Gary Ott
Scientific Support Coordinators
NOAA, NOS, OR&R

Allergic Reactions

Indoor air quality problems at work and home may point to an allergic reaction in some of the people affected. This document briefly reviews allergic reactions.

What are allergies?
Definition: An acquired sensitivity to a substance (allergen), characterized by a marked change in the individual's reactivity to that substance.

What is an allergic reaction?
During the initial contact with the allergen substance, no immunologic response occurs; but, after a latent period of varying length, the individual becomes sensitized. Thereafter, the specific antigen within their body evokes a reaction within minutes or hours. Such sensitivities may occur after a single exposure or may require many exposures. The symptoms are caused by a response of the body's lymphatic and immune systems, which sets in motion a cascade of events that affect other systems, such as the cardiovascular and the dermal systems.

Allergies are common. Overall, allergic diseases are among the major causes of illness and disability in the United States, affecting as many as 40 to 50 million Americans.

What causes allergic reactions?
Technically, almost anything can cause an allergic reaction in some people. Exposure to a particular substance or chemical may result in the body's natural defense mechanism identifying this substance as "foreign" and causing the body to defend itself against this intruder. A wide variety of substances can cause allergic reactions. They include certain foods such as eggs, seafood, peanuts, milk, grain and nuts; some drugs such as penicillin; insect bites or stings; latex; pollen; and a variety of industrial chemicals. Heredity, environmental factors, type and number of exposures, emotional state (stress can increase the sensitivity of the immune system), and many other factors affect allergic reactions.

What are the symptoms?
Common symptoms of allergic reactions include runny nose and watery eyes, wheezing, coughing, itching, and nose and throat irritation. Rash and swelling may also occur. Severe symptoms include difficulty in breathing, vomiting, and in some cases, anaphylactic shock, which is a life threatening situation that requires immediate medical assistance.

Can allergies be treated or prevented?
There is no complete cure for allergies, but three options may help: Avoid the allergen as much as possible; use medication such as antihistamine, to relieve symptoms; and for severe cases, receive a series of allergy shots. In the case of an anaphylactic reaction, the use of an auto-injector epinephrine pen may be necessary. One of these strategies or a combination of them can provide varying degrees of relief from allergy symptoms.

Appendix D